

BARNSELY METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT OF: EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR – CORE SERVICES

TITLE: BARNSELY COUNCIL ANNUAL CUSTOMER COMPLAINTS AND COMPLIMENTS REPORT – APRIL 2022 TO MARCH 2023

REPORT TO:	CABINET
Date of Meeting	26th July 2023
Cabinet Member Portfolio	Core Services
Key Decision	No
Public or Private	Public

Purpose of report

To present the Council's annual customer complaints and compliments report for 2022/23 for compliments and complaints handled under the Council's management of customer feedback procedures.

Council Plan priority

The Council priority this report relates to is Enabling Barnsley.

Recommendations

That Cabinet: -

1. Note and discuss the information contained in this report as required under the complaint's legislation.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Compliments and complaints are important ways in which people can let us know about their experiences. The number of compliments and complaints we receive is a good indicator of how accessible our procedures are rather than a specific indicator of how well or not a service is performing. It's the outcome of the investigations which tells us if things are working well or not.
- 1.2 Our aim is to make sure compliments and complaints are recorded, acknowledged, and appropriately responded to.
- 1.3 The information in the annual report was correct at the time of creation. There may be some variation in future reported data due to updates.

- 1.4 Compliments are when people have let us know that they've had a positive experience with our services. This feedback is a key part of our continuous improvement. We share all compliments with the service they relate to.
- 1.5 Complaints are when people's experience with our services falls below what they expect, and they wish to complain about this. This information is valuable as it provides an opportunity for us to reflect on practice, identify where things may have gone wrong, what can be done to learn from this and offer compensation where required.
- 1.6 We follow our complaints procedures with the aim of:
- clearly identifying a complaint
 - investigating thoroughly and fairly in partnership with the person and service
 - reaching a swift resolution
 - reflecting upon any learning and identifying service improvements.
- 1.7 We also receive contacts where people are not specifically complaining about our actions but wish to offer suggestions, ideas or advice, or make requests for services. We refer to these as non-complaints. All non-complaints are acknowledged, and people are advised why their contact is not being handled as a complaint and which service their contact has been shared with.
- 1.8 Our procedures are written as part of our statutory obligations under the Local Authority Social Services and National Health Services Complaints (England) Regulations 2009, and the Children Act 1989 Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006.

2. Proposal

- 2.1 Highlights from the report to note are:
- 2.2 A total number of 452 customer compliments have been received by the Council. 2022-23 also saw an increase in the total number of compliments received from the figure reported in the previous year (414).
- 2.3 406 customer complaints have been registered during 2022-23 with 16 of these being discontinued or withdrawn. This is a decrease on the previous year's complaint total of 712. Furthermore, this year has seen a continuation in how most complaints are being resolved (390) with most complaints being resolved through early resolution, 259 and 147 requiring formal investigation.
- 2.4 Comparison tables of this year's performance against the previous years on complaint numbers, outcomes, and compliments can be seen in appendix 2.
- 2.5 There is a continuing trend which shows it is the customer who is impacted by the service that is making the complaint, and most complaints were made directly to the Customer Resolution Team (82%). In 2022-23, there has been a decrease in customers making their complaint online (67% from 70%). Work continues to encourage our customers to access our online services.

- 2.6 96% of complaints met their corporate and/or statutory timescale for completion at all stages in the process.
- 2.7 The outcomes from complaints showed 131 cases being upheld (there was fault), 136 partially upheld (there was fault in part), 110 not upheld (there was no fault), 6 inconclusive and 7 pending completion.
- 2.8 In 2022-23, 24 complaints progressed onto the review stage, of which:
- 1 was in Core Services
 - 6 were in Regeneration and Culture
 - 1 was in Environment and Transport
 - 1 was in Adult Social Care
 - 7 were in Education, Early Start and Prevention
 - 5 were in Children's Social Care and Safeguarding
 - 3 were in Communities
- 2.9 There were also 4 complaints which progressed onto the statutory second stage of the Children's Social Care Procedures and 7 to the third and final stage of the process. The 7 stage 3 complaints related to complaints that were received during 2021-22.
- 2.10 The total number of complaints progressing to the next stage of the procedures is a decrease on the number reported for 2021-22 (31).
- 2.11 Our records indicate that we have received 45 contacts from the Ombudsman offices in 2022-23. 25 were from the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO). It is positive to report that there has been a decrease in the number escalating to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman from the previous year's position of 33. 20 were from the Housing Ombudsman Service.
- 2.12 5 of the LGSCO contacts required them to undertake a formal investigation.
- 2.13 The LGSCO annual review letter is expected to be received by the council on the 19 July 2022. This letter provides details of annual performance statistics on the decisions made by them for the council for the year ending 31 March 2023.
- 2.14 As evidenced in the percentages reported, a significant amount of work has been undertaken to improve or maintain performance and in doing so, firmly embedding the importance of complaints. During 2021-22 we highlighted that additional work would be undertaken to continue to improve service delivery and we are pleased to report the Customer Resolution Team are:
- Continuing to proactively work with all services in maintaining high performance levels and striving to meet statutory/corporate complaint requirements and timescales
 - Impressing the importance of delivering a robust and effective complaints service; one that prides itself in resolving dispute matters swiftly and ensuring the needs of our customers is of paramount importance

- Reinforcing this message with attendance at Directorate Management Team and other management meetings to discuss the nature of complaints received, explore where gaps may exist and working collaboratively to get this right next time
- Undertaking targeted work with services where complaints trends and themes are emerging to understand where change needs to happen
- Ensuring the allocation of each complaint through the performance management system
- Taking customer complaints as an opportunity to learn and forge change in the delivery of our services. Reinforcing the application of our values that will enhance service delivery and the customer experience going forwards
- Learning more from what our customers are telling us and striving harder to get underneath what has gone wrong. Challenge the status-quo to make changes and improvements to how we deliver our services
- Continuing to adopt a 'critical friend' approach with services to support learning from complaints through embedding this in systems and processes
- Introduced a POD training course on an introduction to complaints for all staff members and promoted this with service as a tool to support staff members' awareness of how the council manages complaints.
- Completion of a draft policy for how unreasonable and persistent customer behaviour will be managed across the Council, not directly attached to a person who is making a complaint.

2.15 During 2023-24, we plan to continue to build on the above as well as undertake the following:

- Continue discussions with services who are receiving the highest number of upheld complaints to review how they can use the information to learn and improve service delivery.
- Following work in 2022-23 in reviewing our online customer complaint and compliment form we will continue to work towards the implementation of these improvements, including creating a child friendly online form for children and young people to complete.
- Review present system for the management of complaints and compliments with a view to implementing identified changes which will improve service delivery.
- Continue to use information identified from complaints and provided by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman to improve and develop our processes and procedures in the management of complaints.
- Continue the delivery of in-person complaints and compliments training to services.
- Review and embed into good complaint management the newly issued Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman guidance on remedies in the resolution of complaints.

3. IMPLICATIONS OF THE DECISION

3.1 Financial and Risk

Consultations have taken place with representatives of the Service Director – Finance (S151 Officer).

As part of the complaints process a number of formal resolution methods may have financial costs associated with them such as external investigations, reviews and appointment of mediators and financial settlement (where appropriate). The cost of these dispute resolution options is aligned directly to the business unit budget the complaint relates to.

As a resolution to a complaint, it is important that consideration is given when the Council is required to make improvements and how it can remedy the customer for any impact or injustice caused. This may also on occasions have (limited) financial implications, again the cost of any remedy should be done so in consultation with Legal Services and is aligned directly to the business unit budget the complaint relates to.

The effective resolution of complaints can lead to service improvements and complainant satisfaction.

3.2 Legal

The annual report is written as part of our statutory obligations under the Local Authority Social Services and National Health Services Complaints (England) Regulations 2009, and the Children Act 1989 Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006.

3.3 Equality

A full Equality Impact Assessment is not applicable as this is a performance report produced as part of regulations.

The Customer Resolution Team have worked in consultation with the Equality Service during 2022-23 with regards to capturing customer accessibility data in relation to the Council's complaints process. We're pleased to report that equality data commenced being requested from customers who were making a complaint during quarter 4 of 2022-23. Unfortunately, we have only received a low return rate of this information so far to be able to undertake any analysis. However, this data will continue to be collected throughout 2023-24.

3.4 Sustainability

A decision-making wheel has not been completed as this is a performance report produced as part of regulations.

3.5 Employee

All staff should be aware of the complaint's procedures covering their area of work to enable advice to be given to service users of the options available to them.

Staff resources are needed to complete investigations following receipt of a complaint. On rare occasions other procedures such as management investigations may be required following a complaint investigation.

It is recognised that there are a number of complaints each year where the complexity of the complaint can create a high volume of work and commitment for the services they relate to. The reasons for this, whilst individual to the circumstances of the complaint, are often related to dispute resolution, service delivery and procedural requirements (some of which are statutory). It is important to recognise the impact that complex complaints can have upon the workforce in respect of workload and wellbeing. To help mitigate this the Customer Resolution Team provides support to services in the handling of complaints, offers provisions such as training, and welcomes staff feedback on our procedures and processes.

3.6 Communications

The report will be made available on the Council's website upon Cabinet approval.

4. CONSULTATION

This report has been discussed at:

- Business Intelligence, Human Resources and Communications Business Unit Management Meeting – 15 June 2023
- Core DMT – 27 June 2023
- SMT – 4 July 2023

5. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

5.1 Not applicable.

6. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Not applicable.

7. GLOSSARY

LGSCO – Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman
HOS – Housing Ombudsman Service

8. LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix A: Barnsley Council Annual Customer Complaints and Compliment Report – 1st April 2022 to 31st March 2023

Appendix B: Comparable performance table on complaint numbers and outcomes

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- a) Management of Customer Feedback Procedure
- b) Management of Children's Social Care Customer Feedback Procedure

If you would like to inspect background papers for this report, please email

governance@barnsley.gov.uk so that appropriate arrangements can be made

10. REPORT SIGN OFF

Financial consultation & sign off	Senior Financial Services officer consulted and date Neil Copley, Director of Finance – 11 July 2023
Legal consultation & sign off	Legal Services officer consulted: Sukdave Ghuman Service Director for Law and Governance - 13 July 2023

Report Author: Claire Dobby
Post: Customer Resolution Manager
Date: May 2023

PERFORMANCE REVIEW TABLE - COMPLAINTS

Directorate	Business Unit	Complaints Total			Complaint Outcomes	
		Total number of complaints reported in 2021-22	Total number of complaints reported in 2022-23	Increase/decrease	Total number of complaints upheld (full or in part) 2021-22	Total number of complaints upheld (full or in part) 2022-23
Core	Finance	59	54	Decrease	29	34
	Business Intelligence, Human Resources and Communications	4	1	Decrease	1	1
	Customer Information and Digital Services	8	14	Increase	2	9
	Legal Services and Governance	5	4	Decrease	3	3
	Total	76	73	Decrease	35	47
Growth and Sustainability	Regeneration and Culture	63	34	Decrease	29	16
	Environment and Transport	339	149	Decrease	224	114
	Total	402	183	Decrease	253	130
Place Health and ASC	Adult Social Care	49	27	Decrease	25	17
	Total	49	27	Decrease	32	17
Children's Services	Education, Early Start and Prevention	40	21	Decrease	17	12
	Children's Social Care and Safeguarding	116	65	Decrease	47	38
	Total	156	86	Decrease	64	50
Public Health and Communities	Public Health (0-19)	1	2	Increase	0	1
	Regulation Services	5	1	Decrease	0	1
	Communities	23	34	Increase	7	21
	Total	29	37	Increase	7	23
Total	All	712	406	Overall Decrease	391	267

PERFORMANCE REVIEW TABLE - COMPLIMENTS

Directorate	Business Unit	Compliments Total		
		Total number of compliments reported in 2021-22	Total number of compliments reported in 2022-23	Increase/decrease
Core	Finance	14	8	Decrease
	Business Intelligence, Human Resources and Communications	27	14	Decrease
	Customer Information and Digital Services	9	8	Decrease
	Legal Services and Governance	5	9	Increase
	Total	55	39	Decrease
Growth and Sustainability	Regeneration and Culture	33	45	Increase
	Environment and Transport	174	176	Increase
	Total	207	221	Increase
Place Health and ASC	Adult Social Care	37	82	Increase
	Total	37	82	Increase
Children's Services	Education, Early Start and Prevention	9	15	Increase
	Children's Social Care and Safeguarding	13	8	Decrease
	Total	22	23	Increase
Public Health and Communities	Public Health (0-19)	60	44	Decrease
	Regulation Services	3	6	Increase
	Communities	30	37	Increase
	Total	93	87	Decrease
Total	All	414	425	Increase